

ACTIVISM

PRESENTS

CLASS

don't follow the ground

"DISCIPLINED MINDS:

A CRITICAL LOOK

AT

PROFESSIONAL

TRAINING"

JEFF SCHMIDT
AUTHOR OF
DISCIPLINED MINDS

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 29
MARION HALL,
MARION AUDITORIUM
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
7PM

WWW.ALTERNATIVEVOICES.CA

2006

Ottawa, November 29, 2006

Public petition to the American Institute of Physics: Please end your attempts to silence physicist Jeff Schmidt, and reverse your censorship of articles published in the *Canadian Undergraduate Physics Journal* and elsewhere.

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

NAME	AFFILIATION OR OCCUPATION
Tammy Kavich	student.
Katherine McAvoy	canadian citizen, global citizen
Sarah Armstrong	ontario public interest research group
Christie Lefebvre	Canadian citizen
PAUL BECKWITH	student
Simon Frédéric	Student
Mavina Olsen	volunteer
Gerry Olsen	Consultant
ALAIN DESSUREAULT	salesperson
Valérie Duchesneau	student
Daniel Gayley-Daoust	student
Meredith Luce	Student
Dominique Landry	Student
Dominik Marchand	student
Philippe Marchand	M.Sc candidate Physics
Josée Martin	student.
Conor Falvey	student
Lisa Corbin	Student
DANIEL MAJOR	ENGINEERING TECHNICIAN (ELECTRONICS)
Jill Thursby	student
Amy Kishuk	student
Krista Andersson	student
Sara	student.
Henrietta Parnas	student
Jiselle Barker	student
Lia Shan	Student.
Michael Cheevers	Student
Anne-Kristelle Carrier	student
Andréanne Baribeau	Student
Mireille Gervais	Student
Austin Greenhal	student.
Jacinta DeJoseph	student
RACHEL LOWRY	sweater folder / student
Atsushi Nezu	student
NEIL LESAGE	cook
Esther Sennello	Person
Marco Chénard	étudiant/ activiste
Graeme O'Farrell	high school student / community member
Zoë Bidner	High school student
Keira Zikmanis	Ethical cashier
conor labey	musician
Ken Willing	Research & communications
SHANNON LEE MANNION	ACTIVIST
Andrew Pranschke	Activist

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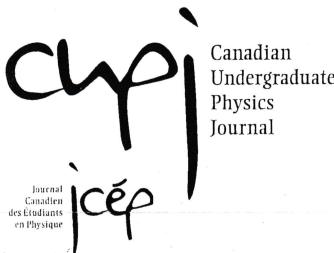
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Ottawa, November 29, 2006

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PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY



PO Box 72049
Sasamat RPO
Vancouver, BC
V6R 4P2

www.cupj.ca
cupj@cupj.ca

Ottawa, July 7th, 2006

Mildred Dresselhaus
Chair, Governing Board
American Institute of Physics
One Physics Ellipse
College Park, Maryland 20740

cc: Members of the AIP Governing Board

Dear Dr. Dresselhaus,

As former and current editors of the *Canadian Undergraduate Physics Journal (CUPJ)*, we are writing to you to protest your efforts to prevent people from reading critical parts of an interview article published in the January 2006 issue of *CUPJ*. We consider the American Institute of Physics's actions to be disrespectful towards the many volunteer Canadian physics students giving their time to create three quality issues of *CUPJ* every year.

Parts of the interview, titled "Thoughts from an undisciplined mind", were whited out on the <http://disciplinedminds.com> website, which is where you censored it as a condition for settling the dispute over your firing of AIP employee Jeff Schmidt. The settlement document posted on the web lists our article among "Material specified by the American Institute of Physics for removal from the *Disciplined Minds* website." We believe there is no justification for hiding from any specific audience the contents of the article published in *CUPJ*.

For example, one sentence that is whited out on <http://disciplinedminds.com/cupj-censored.pdf>, but could be read in the uncensored version at http://cupj.ca/0402_schmidt.pdf, criticizes AIP's *Physics Today* magazine for treating the development of nuclear weapons as something to be celebrated. Isn't the content of *Physics Today* magazine a legitimate issue for discussion within the physics community? Shouldn't the American Institute of Physics welcome such critical thought regarding the discipline it represents, rather than suppress it and stifle discussion?

The *CUPJ* article that you censored received praise from the *CUPJ* editorial board, which understands that an important role of any publication is criticism of the establishment in its own field. Your organization never contacted *CUPJ* or the article's author, Sean Kelly, who joins in this protest.

If your organization disagrees with the content of an article, we believe it should defend its point of view in a letter to the editor, to be printed in a future issue of *CUPJ*. We see this as the legitimate way to pursue debate while respecting the freedom of the press to publish individual opinions on any organization, including the AIP. Before we bring this matter to the attention of the physics community in Canada and beyond, we wish to give you the opportunity to remedy the problem. We look forward to your prompt action.

Sincerely,

Philippe Marchand
Editor-in-Chief, 2005-2006

Marie-Michèle Limoges
Editor-in-Chief, 2006-2007

David Nataf
English Language Editor, 2005-2006

Stephanne Taylor
English Language Editor, 2006-2007

Jeff Mottershead
Distribution Manager, 2005-2007

Shannon Wang
Production Manager, 2006-2007

Sean Kelly
Contributor

Gigi Wong
Managing Editor, 2006-2007

interview

Thoughts from an undisciplined mind

BY SEAN KELLY

Have you ever felt disillusioned, frustrated, disgusted, helpless or confused about how university is, compared to what you thought it was supposed to be, or how you think it should be? If so, you are far from alone.

Disciplined Minds by Jeff Schmidt provides an institutional analysis to explain why things are as they are in the education system, what the hidden parts of the university's agenda are, and how this agenda prevents it from being that caring, learning establishment that we read about in the public relations material. The author uses physics as his main example in describing higher education as "an abusive intellectual bootcamp based on conformity." To give you an idea of this book's impact, the

Schmidt, who has a PhD in physics from the University of California, had been

For more information about the book and see disciplinedminds.com.

Sean Kelly: How do you feel about

What kind of outreach have you felt from the physics community and the broader community in response to this clearly?

Jeff Schmidt:

It implies that the institutions of physics are no less political than institutions in other fields. That implication upsets many physicists, who want to believe that physics is special, that it transcends politics. Those physicists may be naive, but they are not cynical, and so they speak out and make a difference.

SK: In your experience, what fraction of physics professors are aware of the social and political role that they and the institution play?

JS: Professors are hired to produce ideology and people, through research and teaching, respec-

tively. Both activities are social and political, as you say. In research, many professors show "adjustable curiosity" as they conveniently get interested in areas in which the military-industrial-governmental complex makes funding available. Physics professors flock to solid-state physics, for example, even though it isn't inherently more interesting than, say, cosmology.

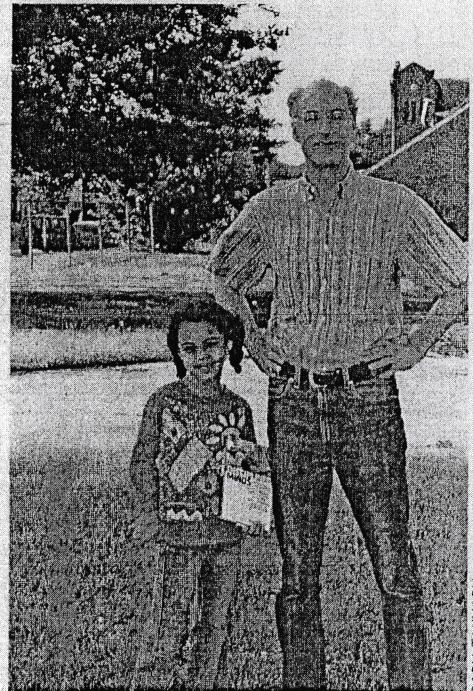
Teaching is often done in a way that alienates students from the subject they love. Pressure to assimilate large amounts of course material and to get good grades leads students to memorize rather than understand, to accept rather than question, to focus on assigned problems rather than self-assigned problems, to be subordinate rather than activists. This is perfect preparation for employment in hierarchical organizations.

Perhaps the strongest evidence that professors are aware of what they are doing is the fact that so few deviate from the social and political role they were hired to play – and the fact that any deviation is almost never accidental. Professors are like salaried professionals throughout society. The rare exceptions are inspiring – and a threat to the status quo. This school year, when University of Ottawa physics professor Denis Rancourt taught a physics course in a way that encouraged activism, he received enthusiastic student support – and two notices of disciplinary action from the university administration.

SK: Do you see any specific ways in which the media acts in this scheme of ideological discipline? I realize that the media is run by rich and powerful interests, and therefore serve those interests, but I am wondering if you, with your apparently keen eye for these things, have noted ways in which they participate directly in maintaining ideological discipline among professionals and non-professionals?

JS: Publications that salaried professionals read, such as the *New York Times*, make sure that every potentially disturbing fact is accompanied by an interpretation that takes the heat off of the system and implies that the reader can relax and stick with the assigned ideology rather than engage in independent thinking. Publications read by those who employ professionals, such as the *Wall Street Journal*, portray a scarier, whatever-you-can-get-away-with world.

SK: What do you perceive as the social/political role of the professional magazine?



DARIA TAKHARU

Jeff Schmidt (right) with daughter Joshua Rose Schmidt holding his book, Disciplined Minds.

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Management was

some-one on their staff who raises questions like this.

SK: What do you think of us publishing this interview in the *CUPJ*?

JS: It's great that the *CUPJ* trusts its readers to handle a radical point of view. Not many media do.

interview

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Schmidt, who has a PhD in physics from the University of California, had been a feature article editor at the magazine for 19 years. To date, more than one thousand people in a wide variety of fields have protested his dismissal. Among the protestors are over 500 physicists, the largest number of physicists ever to speak out on a freedom-of-expression issue in North America. This interview with Schmidt was conducted on 3 December 2005. For more information about the book and his dismissal, see disciplinedminds.com.

Sean Kelly: How do you feel about your dismissal from *Physics Today*? What kind of outreach have you felt from the physics community and the broader community in response to this clearly political dismissal?

Jeff Schmidt: Physicists are protesting *Physics Today*'s action not only because it is repressive, but also because it implies that the institutions of physics are no less political than institutions in other fields. That implication upsets many physicists, who want to believe that physics is special, that it transcends politics. Those physicists may be naïve, but they are not cynical, and so they speak out and make a difference.

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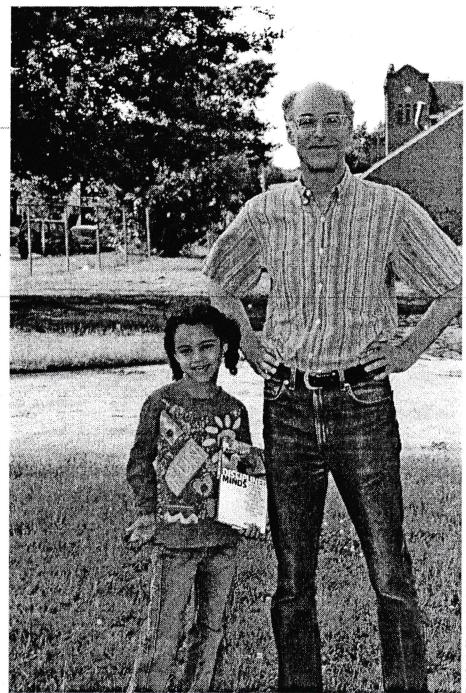
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SK: What do you perceive as the social/political role of the professional magazine *Physics Today*?



DARIA TAKHARI

Jeff Schmidt (right) with daughter Joshua Rose Schmidt holding his book, *Disciplined Minds*.

JS: It is a platform for the physics establishment to address rank-and-file physicists. Some of my coworkers and I pushed to make it a forum for all physicists. The view of the magazine bosses and most of the professional staff is that the magazine should present "The Truth." To determine what that is, the magazine sends submissions that it receives to various members of the physics establishment for review. A minority of the staff and I pushed to make the magazine a place where physicists could debate the issues. That would be a more interesting magazine.

Management was looking for an excuse to get rid of me, in part because I raised questions about the content of the magazine. One time, for example, I saw that the magazine was planning to say prominently, on the table-of-contents page, that the government's Los Alamos and Livermore laboratories "are renowned for the development of nuclear weapons." I objected in writing, pointing out that "renowned" means "celebrated," which isn't how most people in the world, even outside of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, view the developers of weapons of mass destruction. The staff editor who wrote that sentence had simply gone overboard in furthering the magazine's uncritical view of the system. But that phrasing turned out to be fine with management. They rejected my objection and printed the statement unchanged. It's in the October 1996 issue if you want to see it. The bosses are more comfortable without someone on their staff who raises questions like this.

SK: What do you think of us publishing this interview in the *CUPJ*?

JS: It's great that the *CUPJ* trusts its readers to handle a radical point of view. Not many media do.